DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 130 363 CS 501 534

AUTHOR	Lentz, Tony, Ed.
TITLE	Genre.
INSTITUTION	Michigan Univ., Ann Arbor.
PUB DATE	[76]
NOTE	20p.
JOURNAL CIT	Issues in Interpretation; v2 n1 Entire Issue [1976]
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Audiences; Higher Education; *Interpretive Reading; *Literary Analysis; *Literary Genres; *Oral Expression; *Theater Arts

ABSTRACT

In this periodical, six respondents from various colleges and universities provide brief commentaries on the subject of genre study in the field of oral interpretation. According to the pamphlet's editor, all of these critics affirm the importance of literary study and genre study to performance, intimate some dissatisfaction with the terminology employed in broad generic classification, and agree that interpretation is "beyond genre" in its complexity and vitality as a performance medium which has some aspects of criticism. Readers' responses to previous issues include opinions concerning the functional nature of the manuscript for the oral interpreter and the need to maintain the teaching of drama within the discipline of oral interpretation. A brief preview of the next issue's topic, the role of the audience in oral interpretation, is also provided. (KS)

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
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ED130263

ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION volume 2 number 1

"GENRE"

CS 501 534

ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION

Volume Two *Number One*

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ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION is a periodical published by the students in oral interpretation at the University of Michigan on behalf of the discipline and circulated free of charge. Each number of the journal will feature one issue in interpretation for discussion and response. At present, responses will be solicited by the editorial staff. Unsolicited responses may be published at the discretion of the Re-Issue Editor and if space is available. Our limited financial resources restrict the circulation which we hope to increase as our resources increase. Any donation will be appreciated and will be used to expand the circulation and, thus, the utility of ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION.

ISSUES IN INTERPRETATION, Department of Speech Communication & Theatre, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI 48109

Printed by the Regional Career Technical Center, Graphic Arts Department, Ypsilanti, MI.

Typesetting by DEMCO ENTERPRISES, INC.
Ann Arbor, MI

THE ISSUE

"Genre"

"Interpretation must determine where its focus is to be placed and precisely what its art consists of."[1]

It seems that Oral Interpretation is committed to the study of literary genre. Given the history of Interpretation, this commitment is still in its adolescence, attaining its greatest influence, though certainly not its impetus, with the publication of Charlotte Lee's *Oral Interpretation* in 1952. Despite its relatively brief period of influence, this generic perspective, nurtured by the forces of New Criticism, has distinctly influenced the interpretative mentality: organizing textbooks into prose, poetry, and drama; organizing the beginning course through textbook format; providing the rationale for the expansion of course offerings into interpretation of poetry *or* prose *or* drama; and teasing interpreters into specialization along generic lines. For example, that foggy curriculum item known as advanced interpretation owes its cloudiness in part to the clarity of our generic sophistication. Should we ask the performance to proclaim, even to the chance listener in the hall, that the interpreter is reading poetry, or prose? For that matter, can a performance distinguish its generic property for the auditor? What are those non-generic features that are more a part of interpretation itself than the distinctions of genre? Have we been attracted to the foliage of the traditional literati, or is genre the branch beneath our interpretative love nest?

We owe much of our theoretical growth and academic security to our literary sophistication, but have we lost an oral interpretative sophistication along the way? A good interpreter is, after all, a good interpreter, and the features of excellence in interpretative performance tend to cut across rigid generic boundaries. For all its positive virtues, has the study of literary genre diverted us from the greatest challenge we face: that of understanding interpretation and its non-generic standards of excellence?

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1 Frances McCurdy in *The Study of Oral Interpretation*, ed. Richard Haas & David Williams (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975), p. 19

WALLACE A. BACON

I don't know that it suits my own views very well to say that interpretation "is committed to the study of literary genre(s)." It is committed, for me, to the study of the process of performance, which involves a study of the text performed, a study of the performer, a study of the audience for the performer—and doubtless one should add, a study of the art of the writer who produces the text to be performed, a study of any elements (whether or not thus far isolated) which enter into the total process. I take delight in the fact that interpretation has enlarged the questions, increased their number; there is small danger that we shall exhaust the possibilities, and it is not unlikely that as we advance with one foot we may take a step backward with the other—precarious is the balance!

Nevertheless, genre study is one way of getting at the study of literature. We learn by comparing one epic with another, one gothic novel with another; some comparisons are odious—but not all. "Prose," "poetry," and "drama" are too coarse, as terms, for very careful genre study, though they serve as a beginning. My own preference is for modalities (lyric, epic, dramatic) rather than genres in these large categories, but *both* are useful as starters. There is no reason why a course in interpretation *should* be organized by genre, though there is no reason why a perfectly good course should *not* be. One very practical reason for eschewing broad genre organizations is that if one has a course in poetry, one in prose, and one in drama, one may be hard pressed to explain to one's departmental chairman why there is any need for another! ("Advanced poetry? What, in God's name, is *that*?")

"Can a performance distinguish its generic property for the auditor?" It is more to the point to ask whether a performer can convey to an audience that the work he is reading is a poem or a story or a play. If he can't, *something* is rotten outside Denmark! But the point of the performance is certainly not to make clear "I am reading a poem." Or "I am reading a story." Or "I am reading a play."

One of my colleagues makes excellent use in his class of exercises in which students are asked to sense, without speak-

ing, modalities. How does the storyteller feel differently from the lyric speaker? Indeed, how lyric is lyric? Is a "lyrical lyric" more lyric than an ode? (Yes.) These distinctions are fascinating in their complexities. If one can bring a student to some sense of this fascination, he has done well. If he *simply* ends up with a bagful of definitions ("A lyric is . . .") he hasn't gone very far along the road to the future.

One thing such study might do is lead to raised eyebrows at such a sentence as "Have we been attracted to the foliage of the traditional literati, or is genre the branch beneath our interpretative love nest"! The study of genres needn't simply hang over us as "foliage," nor do I find myself in need of clambering out of something called a "love nest." What we need, in this workaday world, is some way of clambering out of our *selves*. A good branch may help.*

Northwestern University

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* Anyone with a serious interest in the study of genre should see Paul Hernadi's *Beyond Genre: New Directions in Literary Classification*, Cornell University Press, 1972.

DONALD R. SALPER

I think oral interpretation in major part is committed to the study of literature (though the forms are many), and one convenient way of grouping the world's literature for study is by genre. I would suppose, though, that we are not relieved from attention to the demands of the "artifices" of narrative tellings vs. lyric expressing vs. dramatic enacting no matter *how* we slice the literary pie.

For it is clear that within each of the roughly grouped "genres" all the generic perspectives are still evident (think, for instances, of the phenomena Eliot points to in "The Three Voice of Poetry," or the narrative function of the chorus in Greek tragedy, or the verse features of Shakespeare's plays, or the dramatic aspects of dialog in most fiction prose, and, too, the lyric voicing in the narration of some fiction, with Agee's *A Death in the Family* as only an obvious instance).

In fact, many of the most important "generic" questions about a work (not the simple prescriptive pigeonholing derived from "hardening of the archetypes," but the serious, reflective pondering about the "order of literature"[1]) are questions most *directly relevant* to the performer's basic task of choosing voices and stances with regard to the literature and the audience.

For these reasons, I have no trouble in recommending the

concept of "locus"[2] as supplying a basis for the focus Prof. McCurdy asks us to determine for interpretation. For I find this concept a major feature of "precisely" what our "art consists."

Locus addresses itself importantly to the typical "generic" stances of speakers in literature (not only cutting across "genres" but through *each* "genre") and sits as happily on the shoulders of the interpreter as literary analyst as it does on his shoulders as performer. Also, and importantly, it seems to be responsive in as comprehensive a way as any one term might, to the happily legitimate and varied concerns of both dramatic and rhetorical theories of the art of interpretation.

Nevertheless (all this being said, and organize your courses how you will), there remain those nubby questions which have teased us to retain the notion of genre as long as we have. If the literature you are performing is a sonnet, something in its performance should suggest to us the several characteristics of its sonnet form no matter how Cummings or Hopkins or whoever may be straining against it; they are also straining *within* it. And "it" (the sonnet) has an identity and is an entity that is *not* responsive to general "features of excellence in interpretative performance." Such features, whatever they may be, are not, and cannot be, the equivalent of knowing what the poet knew: that he was consciously writing within that specific "genre" within a "genre," and that those very chosen limitations were an important and real condition for the *writing* of the poem and necessarily part of the terms for whatever *success* it achieved.

I do believe that general features of excellence in interpretative performance need be taught, features of such general power and usefulness as achievement of responsive locus and tensiveness, "transitive" standards that move from the literature to performance and back again; in fact, each piece of literature that comes before one ought to furnish additional proof of the power and value of those general criteria of excellence in performance. Elsewise we tend toward detachable performance standards that can so easily lead to those twin perpetual villains—not art, not aesthetic, not even moving—self-display and the "battered audience" syndrome.

California State University,
Northridge

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1 See Paul Hernadi, *Beyond Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), for a fine survey of the subject, plus some valuable conclusions.

2 Wallace A. Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972).

DAVID A. WILLIAMS

There are worse germs than genres which contaminate readers/critics of literature. Ever since Aristotle distinguished three modes of poetic discourse twenty-three hundred years ago the genre war has been hot and heavy. Science and poetry make strange bedfellows and if Plato had his way we would have only science. With science we learn to classify literature like plants and animals, as if one epic can actually beget another epic: the *Annales* out of *Argonautica* out of the *Odyssey* out of the *Iliad*! As I read the introduction to this "issue in interpretation," I find many tantalizing targets of thought. But I keep thinking there is a hidden agenda and that "genre" is only a red herring. I keep thinking that the real issue is that of literature versus performance. Are we teaching more literature and less performance?

Critics use labels and names quite like Humpty Dumpty because they talk *about* literature and they want to be "masters." When one talks about literature, vocabulary is useful. Talking about literature is not the same as performing the literature. The interpreter seeks to find out what the voice in the literature sounds like. If a label helps in this process, use it. But if sleeping, gum chewing or taking a bath helps, do it. Genre labels are like directions on a compass, they give us some direction but we must find the way on the way. Performing literature helps us to find the way of the literature. There is nothing inherently wrong with classification, only in its use. Any system or theory which tends to make us regard literature as an externalized form is dangerous. There is an equal bane for the performer to have a system or method and to have none. We use labels such as lyric, epic and dramatic only as a frame of reference. The performance will give us cues as to how lyrical, how epical or how dramatic. Performance transcends genre and gives the reader and audience an opportunity to hear and see language. Literature is a verbal art presenting and representing human sound, action, and vision about what it means to be human.

Too often we give lip service to performance; we don't trust what we know and so we teach literature. After the class knows literature then we let them perform it. Perhaps literature is easier to teach or talk about than is performance. Perhaps if we practiced what we preached we would develop a performance vocabulary rather than the very restrictive literary classification. A performance is an explication. I think we are more performance-minded today, more than we were twenty years ago. I would like to see us use performance as a

tool of explication so that if we need to talk about literature we can talk of the discoveries performance brings to reader and audience. Performance is a way of knowing. I would rather know *Gulliver's Travels* or *Ulysses* than know what they are called by a critic.

The genre game is only one manifested phase of the larger question concerning the focus of interpretation. We perform literature to discover how literature performs and how we should perform it. Critics talk about literature, so the genre game is theirs. Performance is our province, and I perceive a growing interest in expression, voice, diction and kinesics in the last five years. By building wisely on our useful knowledge of literary theory, and discovering the performance potentials in literature, interpretation will be contributing to both literary and performance theory—beyond genre.

University of Arizona

MARY R. HARDWICK

What is the relationship between interpretation and genre? Can a performance distinguish its generic property for the auditor? Perhaps. Usually an auditor is not concerned with his or her ability to recognize the anatomical framework of the design; if interpretation is succeeding, an auditor is absorbed in a meaningful response that is not self-consciously intellectual.

Students filling blue books need to be preoccupied with "genre." As Yale's Murphy A. Sweat said, "I think if we're taking a final it would be helpful to remember that *Winnie-the-Pooh* is a Novel-Comedy-Pastoral and that will put us in the clear." Genre just happens to be one of those handy labels that help identify materials. It is another utilitarian tool which needs to be recognized but not permitted dominance—like the alphabet and IBM cards and the clock. Academicians are always going to be organizing our playgrounds into squares and circles and paragraphs and chapters because that's the way the print world does things. They could make one giant chapter entitled Sense Perception Education for us. But sooner or later someone would break it down into categories just to make it more manageable and not so cumbersome for learners attempting to learn everything at once and pass examinations.

We can't help but admire those individuals who have the ability to distinguish the generic property of a performance.

But then Christopher Robin respects Owl, "because you can't help respecting anybody who can spell TUESDAY, even if he doesn't spell it right"; but spelling isn't everything. "There are days when spelling Tuesday simply doesn't count," says Rabbit. To become preoccupied with identification absolutism is ludicrous and will only contribute further to giving literature to scientists.

Once the interpreter has spirited the truths and beauties off the pages into the vast chaos and magic of the inner consciousness, boundaries and rules cease to reign—or at least that's the way it should be. The nice thing about Interpreters' Theatre is that there are no rules, only knowledge and skills and the entire universe to splash in.

But we can't play Poohsticks forever—"feeling all sunny and careless, and just as if twice nineteen didn't matter a bit." To know the nature of genre is not to be ruled or smothered by it; it is to integrate information technically while the literary enterprise is kept sacred. The latter is our commission; it is our goal; it is our responsibility. Genre is one more thing to recognize for what it is in relation to the total artistic essence—to be comprehended as a useful cataloging device and then added to the repertoire of knowledge that constitutes a small part of the virtuosity needed to be mastered before an interpreter can make that pilgrimage known as being free from things which bind and making literature live.

Clarion State College

JANET BOLTON

Without a doubt, teachers and students of interpretation have become more sophisticated critics of literature in the past thirty years. I well remember reading my way through undergraduate interpretation classes with some flair and a great deal of smug unerring intuition. Then, as a graduate student, I was compelled to undertake, of all things, *rigorous* examination of the literature I proposed to read. The seminar was C. C. Cunningham's "Literature as a Fine Art," a title which during evenings of charts of imagery, figurative language, stanzaic analysis and metrical scansion, I bitterly altered to "Literature as a Fine Point." I rephrased in silence and, until now, have apologized in silence to Dr. Cunningham hundreds of times. His book was perhaps the first of the many excellent texts which have made detailed prosodic analysis and knowledge of literary forms and genres prerequisites for performance.

No one would now advocate regression to primary focus upon techniques of physical and vocal expression. Scholarship, textbooks, and syllabi require the interpreter's authoritative familiarity with his literature. The classical triumvirate of "prose," "poetry," and "drama" provide a framework for most texts and courses. But about this anthological format I have for some time had reservations.

At the outset, do not mistake me. I believe an interpreter should be able to spot a rondeau at twenty paces; I also believe he should be able to bring it down. Whether one argues interpretation as a creative or recreative art, as auxiliary to, implemental of, or co-existent with literature, its symbolic acts are physical and vocal behaviors. The interpreter's ultimate purpose is not contemplation or critical evaluation, but expression and/or communication of a literary text. He may need to approach it as a *construct,* or *series* of *constructs,* or *potential behaviors.* A construct, literary or presentational, is a synthesis of event and attitude, concept and sensibility, motive and form. For the interpretative reader, what the literature is *doing* at any instant becomes paramount. Problems of attitude and tone are not conveniently bound or solved by frameworks of "Petrarchan sonnet," "personal essay," or even "prose," "poetry," and "drama." Is the overall construct one of reflection? Meditation? Persuasion? Exhortation? Description? Indulgence in mood? Revelation of character? Narration? Having fun? Making fun of? What changing series of constructs occur? Storytelling may be in verse or prose, in documentary, epic, or Joycean stream-of-consciousness. Matters of form, style, and genre are of extreme importance as viable and to-be-recognized strategies of the individual story, but the interpreter's concern is directed first to the narrative construct of events and attitudes toward those events. Character revelation is fundamentally the same whether it occurs in a "play," a "lyric" or "dramatic" monologue, or in narrative prose or poetry. Moreover, a number of constructs may appear within the confines of a single rich literary work. Homer's "epic" poetry, Shakespeare's "dramatic" poetry, T. S. Eliot's "lyric" poetry contain reflection, character revelation, persuasion, narration of events, and much more. "To be or not to be" is a dramatic revelation of Hamlet's character and predicament; the soliloquy also stands alone as a reflection and/or a dialectic on suicide. The interpreter must become aware of the *behavior* in which the literature is momentarily engaged and the instant that behavior changes construct. When he reads *Vanity Fair* aloud, he tells of the battle at Waterloo, he characterizes Becky Sharpe and Dobbin, and he must be prepared at a second's

notice, as Thackeray says he must, to change the preacher's shovel hat for the cap and bells of the jester.

Neither knowledge about nor intuitive behavior identification with the literary text constitutes responsible interpretation. With interpretative reading, if it is to pretend to illuminate, goes critical investigation. Its effectiveness, however, is not assured by knowledge of literary forms and genres. Attention may well be directed to appropriate presentational or behavioral constructs. The interpreter presents literature not in terms of "This is how I feel about it," nor "This is how others have written about it," nor "This is how I have analyzed its parts," but "This, insofar as I can *respond, discover, determine,* and *express,* is how it is."

University of Southern California

PAUL NEWELL CAMPBELL

The so-called generic approach of Oral Interpretation is one of the two factors that have conceptually limited, even crippled, the area.

First, it is by no means clear that the poetry-prose-drama division is a workable one from any point of view: it ignores the dozens of literary critics (e.g., Brooks, Warren, Wimsatt, Beardsley) who have argued that literature, *all* literature, is dramatic discourse; then, if drama is literature that is performable (and if it is not, one does not know what it is), this division implies that poetry and prose are *not* performable; finally, it becomes embarassingly difficult to identify, say, "To be or not to be. . ." (drama? drama *and* poetry?), or "My Last Duchess" (poetry? poetry *and* drama?) or Chekhov's *The Harmfulness of Tobacco* (prose? prose *and* drama? prose *and* poetry *and* drama?).

Second, the vital distinction between *verse* and *prose* is weakened or obliterated by the above approach. At least since Aristotle (*Poetics,* 1447b, 1450b, 1451b), this distinction has been made, yet nearly all texts in Interpretation equate poetry and verse, or use the visually-based, traditional view of verse (iambic, trochaic, etc., dimeter, trimeter, etc.), or both. The study of rhythms *as created in performance* would seem so obvious an element of the field; and the poverty of the approach taken by Interpretation becomes apparent when, to cite but one theorist who has worked with rhythm, it is compared with

the richness of Northrop Frye's four-way division—"the rhythm of recurrence," *epos*, "the rhythm of continuity," prose, "The rhythm of decorum," drama, and "the rhythm of association," lyric (from *Anatomy of Criticism*).

Third, it is not evident that there are *any* significant performance differences between poetry, prose, and drama. Those who claim such differences must do more than point to the literary forms bearing those names, for precisely to the extent that attention is drawn to those forms and away from performance, Interpretation becomes an inferior replica of literary criticism and loses any reason for being.

Fourth, there are so many other approaches that might profitably be tried: "modern" (all variants of naturalism), "classical" (based on stage diction and centering on Shakespeare), and "exotic" (all radically experimental and nonwestern styles); or, styles emphasizing words, movement, or silence; or, the classical, romantic, and modern styles; or styles based on cultures. All such approaches have at least the virtue of building a performance area on styles of performance.

University of Kansas

THE EDITOR'S RESPONSE

The respondents to our "Genre" Issue have raised several important points. They have collectively affirmed the importance of literary study to the field. They have identified genre study as a "useful tool" for the interpreter. And they have all intimated some dissatisfaction with the terminology employed in coarse generic classification. More importantly, they have unanimously agreed that interpretation is somehow "beyond genre" through its complexity and vitality as a performance medium with critical dimensions. Most interestingly, however, they have produced a broad range of perspectives on the question that we find challenging and thought-provoking.

The appropriate editorial response to this lively counterpoint of ideas would seem to be an attempt to point the discussion toward the future while satisfying the "dramatic" impetus for a conclusion. The single concept that first comes to mind is the statement by Ray Birdwhistell in *Kinesics and Context* that the meaning of a given behavior is determined by the context in which that behavior is found. If Williams is correct in suggesting that the real issue is "literature versus performance," a helpful restatement might be to ask whether we are placing literature in the context of interpretation, or interpretation in the context of literature.

The question is not as flippant as it might sound, for we do run the risk, as Campbell so forcefully put it, of making interpretation "an inferior replica of literary criticism." The dissatisfaction the respondents expressed with broad generic terminology seems to originate from a lack of vocabulary with which to describe or discuss the behaviors of performance. Surely we are hesitant to enter the territory now conceded to experts in kinesics, linguistics, and intonation for fear of rousing the spectre of elocutionary excess. We appear to find ourselves seeking correlative terminology—from genre or modalities to constructs of potential behaviors—with which to define and describe metaphorically performance events which change, as Bolton notes, from instant to instant.

This is not to suggest that Interpretation should abandon its propinquity to literary study; clearly we must maintain our standards in the face of a rising tide of functional illiteracy. But the next step for Interpretation seems to lie in the direction of a careful examination of intonation, kinesics and linguistics for the tools in their collection which we might find

useful. The study of genre(s), in other words, is not the only "useful tool" for the interpreter. If we are to proceed "beyond genre," as at least two of our respondents suggest, we must develop the critical tools to explore the complex "constructs of behaviors"—both real and potential—that are part of the performance event. Then, perhaps, we may more carefully and completely examine the intricate structures of literature in performance, remaining ever aware that our true quest lies in the search for the spirit beyond the letter.

Interpretation as a field must seek the technical competence to examine the interaction of the varied elements of performance with the sharpest implements available. More and finer instruments appear to be necessary to maintain the dynamic balance between literature and its interpretative context.

RE-ISSUE

Unsolicited responses to all previous issues are enthusiastically encouraged. Re-Issue responses should be kept within 250 words and will be published at the discretion of the editor.

"Myth of the Manuscript"

By way of a preface this responder views the "treasured practice" of the presence of the manuscript for the interpreter not as an ikon or a myth, perhaps not even an "issue." If it is a "non-issue," it is also a convention (part of a reader-audience pact like the prepared introduction *et al.*) in interpretation, which I have elsewhere referred to as a "negotiation . . . with the symbolic presentation of human feeling in an expressive form we call a literary work of art."[1]

Conventions in art require concessions: they may be modified, reinforced, violated, rejected, and questioned. They must not be ironclad. A question about the functional nature of a manuscript for the oral interpreter and for the audience explicitly subsumes three questions, viz., (1) what is the influence of the manuscript on the performer? (2) is a performer of literature different for the manuscript's presence from when he is text-free? (3) are there any advantages or disadvantages directly associated with the presence of the manuscript at all?

This response is predicated on two assumptions, and I think it is extremely important to clarify the grounds of this colloquy. If we do not, we may be talking about different matters, thereby rendering a comparison of responses somewhat useless. First, I assume we are speaking of the *solo* interpretation event and not another thing such as ensemble performance. Second, I assume that the "audience" we are concerned with may be (A) the audience consisting of the oral interpreter who is performing; or (B) the audience at large outside of the classroom in attendance at a performance; or (C) the audience in an interpretation classroom. At least for me it is helpful to accommodate my view to these circumscriptions because *circumstances alter cases* (and conventions)—the circumstances, that is, of the literary work as well as the extra-literary ones. The reader's final desiderata regarding use or non-use of the book include *both* practical considerations and the literary work itself. A wise reader will come to terms with all of the practical matters involved. But what, the reader wonders, do the poem's circumstances and conditions dictate regarding how that poem wants to be. What does the poem reveal that it wants for itself? The human voice will humanize the set of circumstances that is the poem.

The critical "issue" is not the presence of the manuscript but, rather, the interpreter who must have as full control of the text as is possible. That is, as interpreters we must have and maintain the control of the text; as teachers we must teach student interpreters the management of the text. Text management obtains when the manuscript (the book) is physically present and when it is not. A poem is out of control for the performer who has memorized, forgets, starts afresh, or simply retreats—as it is equally out of control for the text-tied interpreter, or for the inept interpreter who holds a manuscript, then gets so far out of his book as to lose his/her place. In these textual encounters the performer, the audience (A, B, C), and the poem all suffer acutely. Somehow one feels that the aesthetic loss is incalculable.

There is a principle that holds in all of the arts but perhaps most especially in the art of interpretation where the main business of the interpreter is the

presentation of a universe the whole world of the work *en patuité*—denoting a patency, an existence clearly manifest to the mind. I submit that the manuscript (physically present or not) *must* serve up to the performer and to an audience a universe that exists by virtue of imposing its own reality upon them—*en patuité*. They should not settle for less.

Virginia Hastings Floyd
Tucson, Arizona

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1. See my "Response" to "Interpreting Emotion in Poetry," in *The Study of Oral Interpretation: Theory and Comment*, ed. Richard Haas and David A. Williams (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1975), p. 122.

"Drama"

Is the current scholarly foraging for the definitive evaluation of the humanistic, literary, and performative worth of drama in Oral Interpretation productive? Should drama be kept or thrown out of the inner sanctum of the discipline? I find this question irritating. The pedantic attitude this question implies stifles the artistic and creative possibilities inherent in our art form.

Those who would exclude drama from Oral Interpretation argue that a play is written to be performed in a theatre, thus its ideal performance would be a full scale theatrical production. I wish to take issue with this viewpoint. The performative mode of presentation should be determined by whatever performative values of the literature you wish to stress. For example, a farce like Moliere's *The Physician in Spite of Himself* requires well-timed and intricate physical business to realize its humor. This type of play, which depends so heavily on verbal-physical interaction, would be ideally suited to a more conventional theatrical production. A play which depends heavily on pageantry or spectacle would also operate more effectively in the theatrical mode. However, there are many plays which might be better served by the oral interpreter, depending on which performative values you wish to stress. The plays of Chekhov, Pinter, and O'Neill have in common a high degree of orality. They are contrapuntally textured, and have tremendous ear appeal. If orality is a major focal point in your view of one of these plays, then I suggest that a readers theatre might be most successful in revealing the orality of these plays to your audience. Shakespeare's plays abound with complex imagery and profound psychological intricacies. Haven't there been times when you were so involved with "the total production" that much of the poetic imagery and the subtleties of character psychology slipped by you? Again, depending on the performative values you choose to highlight, perhaps Shakespeare can best be presented by the oral interpreter.

If we exclude drama from the discipline of Oral Interpretation, we rob ourselves of a wealth of humanistic, literary, and performative potential. There are many avenues open to the interpreter that are not open to the theatrical actor and director. Interpreters may compile the work of one, several, or many playwrights. We can gain insight into a particular playwright, era, or dramatic style. Productions can be created to reveal a theme or compare divergent treatments of the same theme. The creative possibilities are endless.

Drama should not be made an idol or even worse a scapegoat, but should be viewed as a major genre of literature and a flexible, multi-faceted, and creative force in Oral Interpretation.

Judith W. B. Williams
University of Michigan

THE NEXT ISSUE

The Audience in Oral Interpetation: Theory

Oral interpretation has traditionally centered its attention on the three dimensions of text, performer, and audience. But from an examination of journal articles and textbooks, it seems that audience, as an apparent equal of either text or performer, has been given only passing interest, or perhaps left to individual teachers for their emphasis. Even Charles Woolbert, one of the first theorists to emphasize the role of the audience, did not develop his point, other than to assert that the audience was "the end and aim of interpretation."[1]

Seventeen years ago, Wallace Bacon's metaphor of oral interpetation's "dangerous shores" vividly illuminated our discipline's continuing disagreement between those who advocated emphasis on performance and those who stressed textual concerns. His remarks, however, richocheted off audience: "Too much interest in the audience is as bad as too exclusive interest in the text—another way of looking at the dangerous shores."[2] Those of us inclined to Professor Bacon's matching of two forms, the text and the performer, are still concerned about the moment of that matching in front of an audience. Is the matching not, indeed, a matter of three forms—text, performer, and audience? Or does the fact of performance before an audience establish yet another way of looking at the dangerous shores: the match of performer with text on one shore, and the audience on the other?

Most theorists since 1900 have focused their attention on either the performer or the text. Paul Gray, studying S. S. Curry's indebtedness to Romantic critical theory, has said that "the essence of Curry's theory is the contention that the character of the reader should be synonymous with the character of his material."[3] But Romantic criticism, as M. H. Abrams has written, fostered theory which on priciple diminished the importance of the audience as a determinant of poetry and poetic value. Even when oral interpretation shifted its focus from Romantic to New Critical theory, the place of audience remained uncertain, for this critical posture emphasized that meaning transcended mere communication of ideas or attitudes. Literature, in this view, was a complex pattern of meaning which communicative intent might too simply reduce.

Oral interpretation creates a unique communicative act, addressed to an audience unlike that of either the public speaker's or the actor's, as Jere Veilleux has elsewhere pointed

out.[4] Because of the paucity of explicit commentary on the subject of audience, we offer three consecutive issues of this journal to investigate the dimensions of audience in oral interpretation. The first issue will deal with the theoretical posture taken both before the fact of performance and as a guide for the location and importance of audience in oral interpetation theory. The second issue will consider the unique role of the audience within each specific piece of literature; and the final issue in the series will focus on the role of the audience in the act of performance itself.

But even dividing the issue into these three areas does not simplify the problem we face in discussing any one of them. First, there is conflicting opinion. Some modern theorists maintain that the performer-audience relationship is necessary for interpretation. Paul Hunsinger states that interpretation "must always be an exchange between two or more. If it is only one way it is not interpretation."[5] Frank Rarig believed the audience acted as the "final judge" in the interpretative act. Rarig maintained that no art work was complete until it had "done its work on an observer." In addition, books by Brooks, Bahn, and Okey, and Aggertt and Bowen claim that audience response (or appreciation and understanding) is the goal of the performer. Other writers do not emphasize the role of the audience. Paul Campbell, for instance, believes the performer may be his own, and perhaps his only, audience. And Wallace Bacon has stated that an interpreter can focus too much attention on the audience, to the detriment of the literature. Enactment, Bacon tells us, the primary object of the interpretative act, is "the bodying forth of 'the whole complex structure which is the work of literature.'"[6] It seems possible, then, to include the role of the audience in that "whole complex structure which is the work of literature," unless that takes the ground away from the literature.

But can interpretation function effectively without an audience of auditors? By removing an outside audience, do we, as Woolbert believed, leave out half the communicative equation? On the other hand, if we seek to have interpretation function simultaneously as a communicative and aesthetic act, does the communicative intent of the performer compete with his aesthetic contemplation, and thereby diminish for the interpreter one of the touchstones of modern oral interpretation?[7] Or must the role of the audience in oral interpretation remain a paradox, a conclusion reached earlier by David A. Williams in *Interchange?*[8]

1 Charles H. Woolbert and Severina Nelson, *The Art of Interpretative Speech* (1927).

2 Wallace A. Bacon, "The Dangerous Shores: From Elocution to Interpretation," in Richard Haas and David A. Williams, eds., *The Study of Oral Interpretation: Theory and Comment* (1975), p. 7.

3 Paul Gray, "The Romantic as Reader: S. S. Curry and Expressive Aesthetics," *QJS*, LV (December 1969), 368.

4 Jere Veilleux, "The Interpreter: His Role, Language, and Audience," *Speech Teacher*, XVI (March 1967).

5 Paul Hunsinger, *Communicative Interpretation* (1967), p. 52.

6 Wallace A. Bacon, "The Dangerous Shores A Decade Later," in Haas and Williams, p. 222.

7 For a discussion of aesthetic and rhetorical distance, see David M. Hunsaker and Craig R. Smith, "Rhetorical Distance: A Critical Dimension," *Western Speech*, XXXVII (Fall 1973).

8 David A. Williams, "The Reader Audience Paradox," *Interchange: Student Thought in Speech Communication*, I (September 1971).

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The editorial staff wishes to acknowledge and thank departments and individuals on behalf of departments who have contributed $25 or more to support the second volume of *Issues in Interpretation*. We also appreciate personal contributions made independently of patronage.

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A final note of thanks to the individuals who supported Volume I.